Ph . D Synopsis (English)

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Title of the Thesis

Ebb and Flow of Human History in the Novels Of Chinua Achebe

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1. **Title of the Thesis: Ebb and Flow of Human History in the Novels of Chinua Achebe**

2. **Introduction**

Chinua Achebe is the best known novelist not only from Nigeria but from the entire continent of Africa. In the fictional contribution of Achebe there is a powerful and dramatic representation of the past of the Igbo people. The phenomenal manner in which Achebe interprets a society whose traditions were disrupted by the intervention of colonialism and reflect on the changes which have come about in Igbo society in particular and Nigerian life in general, elevates his works to a higher level and make it a part of the ebb and flow of human history itself. No wonder he won critical acclaim and has received numerous honors from around the world - more than thirty honorary doctorates from universities in England , Scotland , the United States , Canada , Nigeria and South Africa .

The continent of Africa was thought to be 'the dark continent , a poor country inhabited by the people who were primitive, uncivilized and savages by the historians, particularly early Europeans. But later researches have shown that Africa was neither primitive nor uncivilized even before the Europeans occupied it. It had built not only the ancient Egyptian civilisation but also many other centres of such development. The empires of Ghana, Mali, Ife Zimbabwe are some of these. It was only after America was discovered by the Europeans that the Africans faced ebb of life. Africans were taken as slaves for economic exploitation and this had far reaching effects on history. Chinua Achebe 's whole effort has been to correct this picture. He has himself said that he would be satisfied if his novels did no more than teach the readers that their past - with all their imperfections – was not one long night of savagery. In fact, genetic and fossil evidences have also shown that homo sapiens evolved in Africa only. A growing number of researches also point out that long negelected Africa was the original home of the modern humans who first trecked out of the continent. So studying about Africa and its history is actully studying the ebb and flow of human history also.

The study of the ebb and flow of human history is a rewarding exercise for it gives us knowledge of the past, makes us understand the present and takes us to the future. Ebb and flow is a form of hydroponics that is known for its simplicity and reliability of operation and so are the novels of Chinua Achebe. Although they are simple, yet they provide a deep multilayered look of human development. They reveal the extent to which traditional values were on their rise and then after the entrance of the white man the values have been turned upside down and this has resulted in gloom and uncertainty. In such cases, the cultures crumble and civilizations disintegrates while history marches ahead taking all these events in its stride. This is the ebb and flow of human history. Chinua Achebe, the third world writer, has not only documented these cataclysmic changes in human history but has also offered solution from a proper perspective by motivating and guiding people in achieving their political freedom meaningfully, functionally and relevantly. In this way, the ebb and flow of history as revealed in Achebe's novels provides us the accessibility and preservation of primitive culture. It gives us an insight into human history as well which is an enriching experience - hence the relevance of this project.

3. **A brief review of the work already done in the field**

Chinua Achebe is a well known Nigerian writer of the twentieth century . He has attracted many scholars and critics nationally and internationally for his critical studies . The most notable full length studies of Chinua Achebe are the following.

S.A Khayyoom's *Chinua Achebe : A Study of His Novels* discusses Achebe's fictional art with particular reference to the art and technique in his novels. Bernth Lindfors and Bala Kothandaraman's *South Asian Responses to Chinua Achebe* is a collection of essays. They are specially written by eminent SouthAsian scholars. They cover a variety of text and discussions of his short fiction, critical essays and political ideas. Indrasena Reddy's *The Novels of Achebe and Ngugi* is a study of the dialectics of commitment . Innes *Chinua* Achebe places a particular emphasis on Achebe's Africanization of the novels and tries to discern the element which he has used and what

innovation he has made during his development as a novelist. Besides these full length studies there are several critical and biographical websites that have collections of critical articals and essays on Achebe.

The above mentioned works, no doubt, provide perspectives on Achebe and discuss critical aspects of his novels, but they neither thrown light on the religious values nor present the complete picture of the ebb and flow of human history, nor have they made a study of comparison of Indian and African culture in detail. This humble effort of mine attempts to make a detailed study in this direction and that way try to fill the gap in Achebe's criticism.

4. **Objectives**

Africa was thought to be a Dark Continent , a poor country inhabited by bushman . Africa was always known for the throbbing big drums , the primitive customs and its wilderness . But the African literary writing has emancipated a part of Africa and highlighted its rich culture and mythology , Achebe delves deep into African tradition and views. All his five novels contain deep humanitarian concern , depicting the various complexities of life .

The present study proposes to throw light on the ebb and flow of humanity with reference to the three colonial novels, that is, *Things Fall Apart* , *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God* and the two post colonial novels , *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah* . A comparison between the African tribal culture and Indian tribal culture will also be discussed. Since Achebe has been influenced by the Holy Bible, an attempt will also be made to throw light on the religious aspect of his novels. His use of Biblical quotation , allusion and Christian imagery will also be dealt with . The objective of such a study is to make a critical and analytical study of the manner in which the ebb and flow of history are recorded and contribute for the total fictional experience in the creative writings of Chinua Achebe.

5. **Noteworthy contribution in the field of proposed work**

Since innumerable critical works, articles and essays have been published on Chinua Achebe, it is difficult to mention all in this synopsis. However, an attempt has been made to select a few.

Cook, David. *African Literature : A Critical View*.

Dathorne , O . R. *The Black Mind : A History of African Literature* .

Innes , C.L. and B. Lindfors *Critical Perspectives on Achebe*.

Isichei , E. *A History of the Igbo People.*

Killam, G.D. *The Writings of Chinua Achebe.*

Wren , Robert M . *Achebe's World :The Historical and Cultural Context of the Novels of Chinua Achebe* .

Chinua Achebe is a post modern writer and so it is natural that his works are a source of interest to the present day . But an honest and serious approach is warranted to understand his works aright and see him in right perspective. After examining the above mentioned works, it has been observed that although the scholars have studied the fiction of Achebe in the historical contexts, the ebb and flow of human history that his works record is a subject that has not been dealt with . Such an attempt as would be done in the proposed study is, therefore, totally justified.

6. **Proposed methodology**

While pursuing this research work it is proposed to study all the works of Chinua Achebe and also those written on or about him . The material for research will be collected from various sources such as renowned libraries like SCILET (Study Center for Indian Literature and

Translation) , Madurai, IACIS (Indo American Centre for International Studies) Hyderabad , CIEFL (Central Institute of English and Foreign Language) Hyderabad ,The British Library , University libraries .

On a modern writer like Achebe , the internet will be of much help. Through the NLIST connectivity of INFLIBNET e-journals and E-library will also be accessed. However, care will be taken to reap the benefits of the electronic facility to find the details and truth and not to simply copy the material .

The project would follow the interpretative and analytical method in analyzing the sources . The approach would be qualitative and will be based on insights and impression .

The thesis writing will be done according to the guidelines provided in the latest edition of *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* written by Joseph Gibaldi , which would ensure the thesis to be of internationally acceptable standard in format .

7. Expected outcome of the proposed work

The Igbo society, which is Achebe's main concern, like human history is a curious mix of both good and evil, the spiritual and the mundane and finally glorious and the gory elements. While the good, spiritual and the glorious refer to the flow of human history, the evil, the mundane and the gory elements show its ebb. The expected outcome of the proposed work will be a thesis on Achebe's humanitarian concern with the tides of time. Such a study to the best of the researcher's knowledge has not been attempted so far. A comparison between the African tribal culture and the Indian tribal culture would be something new. As Achebe was much influenced by the Bible, throwing light on the religious aspect would be an achievement. His use of biblical allusions and the colonial and the post colonial factors will be dealt with. This will help to understand Achebe's development as a writer better . History may not repeat itself exactly but it does offer parallel situations. It is expected that an in

depth study of the ebb and flow of human history through the novels of Achebe would provide a proper sense of history which will help to understand the present and lead one to the future with confidence. With this hope it is proposed to proceed on following lines .

Chapter I

Nigeria : Socio Political Development : An Introduction

Achebe emphasizes 'The use and abuse of power' either by the Whiteman or by the natives, in his novels .This chapter will survey briefly the history and social organization in Nigeria through the ages. It will focus on the political crisis in Nigeria for power and supremacy . This will help to understand Achebe better as the motifs (theme) of power and struggle run as an undercurrent in the novels of Achebe

This chapter will also focus on the development of African literature before and after the arrivals of the Europeans . Primarily the focus shall be on the development of novel as a form of literature in Africa .This will place Achebe's novels in a proper literary perspective.The chapter will also examine the major events in the life and literary career of Chinua Achebe and a brief discussion of his five novels will also be included .

Chapter II

Humanism and Non Humanism

Achebe is a serious and dedicated artist . He wants his readers to 'explore the depth of human condition'. He depends heavily on anthropological details to project the true traditional Igbo life and its cultural crisis . Culture, tradition and society are predominant in his novels. This chapter will emphasis on the African culture , tradition and deviation . it will also focus on the comparison and contrast between the tribal culture of Nigeria and India.

Chapter III

Quest for Identity

Achebe's novels define African identity and make the African rediscover his cultural roots. They are united by a common purpose revealed in the mode of narration . Achebe traces the decline and fall of the Igbo utopia towards the political nightmare of a corrupt society and thus renders meaningfully the Igbo encounter with historical change and crisis and uses creatively his sense of past and present. Achebe's novels collectively constitute a vision of life . He pictures the traditional village life in conflict with the alien forces which results in an identity crisis. Here the colonial factor demands attention . The sense of tragedy in his novels springs from the traumatic experiences of colonial rule and social disintegration .

This chapter intends to project the historical reality , the ruptures of values and a collapse of the black identity as revealed in the fiction of Achebe. Special attention will be paid to life under colonialism and also the process of decolonization and the affects of it on humanity .

Chapter IV

Achebe: A Modern Classic

Chinua Achebe the doyen of modern African writing in English , his own vision of order , design and pattern . He is an interpreter of men , society and literature and believes in art literature .His novels present a conflict between tradition and modernity or between social and occult or within the clan between community and individual. His art is an exploration of the traditional past and present . His myths conduct a spiritual search for distinct meaning of life. Achebe gives a symbolic meaning to his novels. Interestingly his tools are religion and

rebellion . Exploration of Achebe's fiction on religion , to my knowledge has not been attempted so far .

This chapter will focus on Achebe's art and technique, biblical allusions, religion and alienation , and analysis of female images. It will also throw light on superstitions, faith and frustration .

Chapter V

An Apocalyptical Vision : Conclusion

Man is an intermix of both good and evil in unequal proportion. Achebe seems to strike a middle path based on the Igbo concept of duality of things, one thing balancing and correcting the other . His approach is actually multidimensional. He lays emphasis on history, politics, culture, religion etc . His treatment of themes as well as techniques used are different . He makes his readers aware of humanistic values and socialistic goals .The purpose of this chapter would be to sum up the assessment made in the earlier chapters and conclude Achebe as an artist representing the ebb and flow of human history and thereby revealing the human soul.

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This synopsis is hereby forwarded to the Research Degree Committee for approval .

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